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## **YORK REGION CENTRES AND CORRIDORS STRATEGY**

**The Planning and Economic Development Committee referred the following report, June 16, 2004, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services to Regional Council for consideration at its meeting on June 24, 2004:**

### **1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that:

1. Council endorse the Centres and Corridors Strategy.
2. Staff continue to monitor and provide regular updates to council regarding ongoing joint Centre and Corridor implementation activities with local municipalities, GTA partners and other public and private agencies.

### **2. PURPOSE**

The York Region Centres and Corridors Strategy (*Attachment 1*), was first presented in draft form to Regional Council in May 2003 and January 2004. Since that time the Strategy has been distributed widely throughout the Region and the GTA, and has been given extensive public exposure throughout the summer of 2003 and winter of 2004. This report outlines comments received and proposed changes to the strategy brochure and highlights next steps to be taken by staff. It is staff's intention to continue monitoring and provide Council with regular updates regarding the implementation of the Strategy's key action items.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

Focusing growth and infrastructure investment in centres and corridors has been a key goal of the Regional Official Plan since its adoption in 1994. This approach represents good planning and is central to the Region's Growth Management Strategy. Centres and corridors also play an important growth management role across the entire GTA. This role is emphasized in the report entitled "Centres & Corridors – Growth Management in the GTA", prepared by Regional Planning Commissioners of Ontario. This report was presented to Planning and Economic Development Committee members in January 2004.

York Region's Centres and Corridors Strategy is designed to facilitate the development of an urban structure based on a network of higher density, mixed use regional and local Centres that are connected by rapid transit Corridors. Although there have been a number of significant successes such as the amalgamation of local transit services and the development of detailed Secondary Plans for three of four of the Regional Centres, significant challenges remain.

The York Region Centres and Corridors Study entitled Making it Happen! (presented to Planning and Economic Development Committee members January 2003) concluded that a coordinated set of activities and initiatives by all levels of government and the private sector is needed to bring the envisioned system of Regional Centres and Corridors to life. The Centres and Corridors Strategy is an action plan designed to implement a significant number of the Study's key recommendations, which have been grouped under four action areas:

1. Policy
2. Financial Policy and Tools
3. Infrastructure Investment; and
4. Supportive Programs.

It is anticipated that successful implementation of the four action areas by York Region will create a favourable climate for significant private sector investment within the Regional Centres and Corridors by:

- Enhancing demand within centres and corridors
- Reducing private sector investment costs; and
- Reducing private sector risk.

### **3.1 Relationship to Regional Official Plan Amendment 43**

The Centres and Corridors Strategy provides broad policy direction and details forty actions that are required to achieve the envisioned urban structure of Regional Centres and Corridors. A key element is the proposed Regional Official Plan Amendment 43 (ROPA 43). Support and guidance for the ROPA is found under the Policy section of the Strategy and includes the following three key action items:

- Provide strong planning guidance including density targets, urban design and streetscaping performance standards.
- Require the preparation of detailed secondary plans and tertiary plans if appropriate for the Regional centres and corridors. These plans should clearly identify the extent of centres and corridors including transition zones, key opportunities for intensive development and ensure public gathering places and parks are provided for.
- Protect existing neighbourhood areas adjacent to centres and corridors by requiring transitions in scale, height and density.

ROPA 43 proposes six key enhancements to existing centres and corridors policies within Section 5 of the Regional Official Plan that aim to:

- Establish and review secondary plans for Regional Centres and Corridors.
- Identify Key Development Areas (KDAs) as the focal points for compact development.
- Establish a long term density target for Regional Centres and locally-identified Key Development Areas with the Regional Corridors.
- Create and review urban design guidelines.
- Coordinate development and infrastructure investment.
- Encourage the use of a wide range of implementation tools and strategies.

The overall intent of ROPA 43 is to provide a policy framework that strengthens the city-building efforts of the local municipalities and clarity to the development process by clearly identifying the areas most suitable for intensified compact development within the Region's centres and corridors. These goals reflect and are supported by the objectives and identified actions within the Centres and Corridors Strategy. A statutory meeting for ROPA 43 is scheduled for June 24, 2004. Staff propose to present a revised version of the amendment to Planning Committee and Regional Council by the end of 2004.

### **3.2 Circulation and Consultation**

The draft Strategy was presented to Council in May 2003 and was circulated broadly to private and public agencies throughout the province. In addition to our local municipalities, the draft strategy was forwarded to:

- All York Region library systems and school boards.
- All the Regions of the GTA.
- The Cities of Toronto and Hamilton.
- The membership of the Regional Planning Commissioners of Ontario (RPCO).
- The Government of Ontario.
- All local area MPs, and MPPs.

The draft Strategy was also displayed at seven public open houses over the summer of 2003 as part of preliminary public consultations for the proposed York Region Centres and Corridors Regional Official Plan Amendment (ROPA 43).

In addition to the above seven presentations on the Centres and Corridors Strategy and the proposed ROPA 43 were made to local municipal councils and committees between January and April 2004. Also, six public consultation/open houses were held in the Towns of Aurora, Markham, Newmarket, Richmond Hill and the City of Vaughan.

## **4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS**

Comments and reaction to the Strategy from both the public and the local municipalities have been positive. However, issues have been raised regarding ROPA 43 and a number of site specific applications in defined corridors. These issues centre around the site specific challenges of implementing compact development such as the amount of density, impact on surrounding uses and the height of buildings. The Strategy is viewed as supportive to ongoing local initiatives, such as the City of Vaughan's and the Town of Markham's Highway 7 Corridor studies. Written comments from the Town of Newmarket note that the Strategy represents "good planning" and is supportive of the upcoming review of the Town's Official Plan and Zoning By-law. Excellent feedback has also been received from the public during the consultation process. Written comments have also been received from the Town of Richmond Hill. Although the majority of the

comments and opinions expressed at the sessions were specifically directed at the proposed ROPA 43, common themes related to the Strategy include:

- The Region's long-term vision is appropriate and necessary.
- Better enforcement of the Region's policies is required.
- More education and better communication is required to change perceptions regarding centre and corridor development; and
- Public sector leadership and private sector involvement are required and ongoing efforts to define the roles and responsibilities of each should continue.

Based on the comments received from the local municipalities and heard during the public consultations, changes to the Strategy brochure are minor in nature and include the following:

- Removal of "Draft" from the front cover.
- Updated Council photos.
- Addition of "The creation of a clear, high density mixed use graphic vision for the Region's Centres and Corridors" to the list of successes.
- Updated graphics and images.

#### **4.1 Ongoing Initiatives**

A number of the draft Strategy's actions are ongoing at both the Regional and local level. A breakdown of these activities and their current status is provided in the attached Detailed Action Plan Matrix (*Attachment 2*). Highlights of York Region's activities include:

- Proposed Regional Official Plan Amendment for Centres and Corridors (ROPA 43).
- A study of the financial strategies and options to facilitate intensification with the Regional Centres and Corridors.
- An urban design charrette attended by 40 municipal planning staff, professional design consultants, and development representatives (Planning and Economic Development Committee Report, March 3, 2004).
- YRTP's "Quick Start".
- Summary Report on Centres and Corridors in the GTA.

#### **4.2 Next Steps**

In addition to incorporating the revisions and finalizing the Strategy brochure, Regional staff will continue implementing the Strategy's key recommendations. It is anticipated that both the ROPA and the financial strategy study for Centres and Corridors will be complete by the end of 2004. Other activities include the upcoming Statutory Public Meeting on the proposed Centres and Corridors Regional Official Plan Amendment in June 2004 and updated GTA population and employment forecasts by fall 2004 with York Region forecast updates in early 2005.

Regional staff will also continue to collect and receive comments on the proposed Regional Official Plan Amendment throughout the summer of 2004. Staff will also continue to monitor and support local activities such as the ongoing Highway 7 corridor studies in Vaughan and Markham. Potential new local initiatives for the remainder of 2004 include working with staff from the Town of Newmarket to review the Town's

Official Plan. This work could involve the creation of a set of graphic images for the Newmarket Centre as well as a new Secondary Plan. The attached Detailed Action Plan Matrix outlines key implementation steps to be undertaken and serves as a method of monitoring progress in the Centres and Corridors. Staff will report to Planning Committee and Council on a regular basis on the progress of the Strategy's action plan.

#### **4.3 Relationship to Vision 2026**

The goals and objectives of Vision 2026 are intended to protect and enhance the quality of life York Region's residents currently enjoy. The achievement of the planned urban structure of Centres and Corridors will facilitate the transformation of the Region from a suburban community to a more diverse, accessible and efficient urban-city region, while protecting the Region's natural heritage and rural resources. York Region's Centres and Corridors Strategy complements the growth management, housing, transportation and economic development objectives of Vision 2026. In order for the Region to continue to be economically successful in the long term and maintain and improve its quality of life, the desired urban structure must be supported and achieved.

### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Financial policies for growth infrastructure and service provision are key tools in building sustainable communities, including Centres and Corridors. A compact, efficient urban structure is essential to the Region's economic and financial vitality. This urban structure based on centres and corridors also supports the Region's transit initiatives and YRTP. Centres and Corridors will, in the medium term, generate significant increases in assessment revenue and attract new growth. However, it is critical to recognize that adjustments to financial policy, programs and tools have a cost and a direct impact on the tax levy, user rates and DC rates. Any potential changes to financial tools will be accompanied with an extensive analysis on the impacts to all stakeholders.

Regional staff are now undertaking a study with Hemson Consulting on the financial strategies and options to facilitate the intensification of Regional Centres and Corridors. The purpose of the study is to assess financial strategies, including residential and non-residential development charge options and tax-based strategies to support and enhance development in Regional Centres and Corridors, and determine the impact of these strategies on the balance of the Region.

### **6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT**

Local municipalities have made significant strides in achieving a more efficient and compact urban form. The Centres and Corridors Strategy aims to build on this success and continue to support local city-building initiatives. Regional staff consulted extensively with local municipal staff in the development of the Centres and Corridors Strategy and the proposed Regional Official Plan Amendment. Implementation of the

Centres and Corridors Strategy will require coordination of efforts between Regional and local staff. York Region will continue to monitor and support local initiatives and will continue to consult local staff regarding Regional activities within the context of Centres and Corridors.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

York Region's Centres and Corridors Strategy is a key component of the Region's Growth Management system. Concentrating development within a network of Regional Centres and Corridors has been a key objective of the Region's Official Plan for the past ten years. Strong Centres and Corridors also go hand in hand with the Region's Vision 2026 initiative, and current rapid transit initiatives. The Strategy provides broad policy direction and details a number of actions required to achieve the envisioned urban structure. A key element is the proposed Centres and Corridors Regional Official Plan Amendment. A Statutory Meeting for the proposed ROPA is scheduled for June 24. A final draft of the amendment for Regional Council approval is anticipated to be presented to Committee by the end of 2004.

The Centres and Corridors Strategy is an action plan that highlights key implementation initiatives to make the envisioned urban structure a reality. The Strategy was developed in consultation with the Region's local municipal partners and is intended to support ongoing local initiatives within the Regional Centres and Corridors. Ultimate success of the Strategy will depend upon coordination of efforts between the Region and the local municipalities as well as the active participation of senior level of governments and the private sector.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

*(A copy of the attachments referred to in the foregoing is included with this report and is also on file in the Regional Clerk's Office.)*